

# Students: Increase state aid

Westbury shorted by \$39.5M, they say

BY JOIE TYRRELL

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A total of 39 Westbury students — each representing 1 million dollars of state aid shortfall, they said — rallied with signs and slogans outside the high school Tuesday in a call for their fair share of “Foundation Aid.”

“We want to make sure that the state knows that we are concerned about the Foundation Aid we are lacking and how it affects us as students,” said Jessica Ellis, 16, a junior and student council president. “We are taking a stand and saying ‘Enough is Enough.’”

The Foundation Aid calculation — a vehicle for public school funding — considers community wealth, the number of students, the needs of the students and other factors. Statewide, Foundation Aid represents about 68 percent of total state aid spending.

Westbury school officials said

the district should receive \$74.5 million for the 2018-19 school year. The governor’s budget allocates \$35 million to the district, about 47 percent of what the state’s own calculation says Westbury should receive, according to district officials.

“This leaves the Westbury School District underfunded by over \$39.5 million, according to the state’s own formula,” school officials said in a news release.

Morris Peters, with the state Division of Budget, said school aid was determined each year and, since 2012, Westbury’s aid had increased from \$30 million to more than \$56 million — “a rate of growth that’s more than twice the state average. Last year alone, Foundation Aid for Westbury increased by 22 percent, one of the largest increases in the entire state budget,” he said.

School aid statewide would rise to a total of more than \$26.3 billion under Gov. Andrew M.



Students call for more state aid during a rally Tuesday outside Westbury High School.

Cuomo’s proposed budget. The biggest increase would be \$338 million for Foundation Aid, state officials confirmed.

Tuesday afternoon at Westbury High School, students held up signs reading “Fund our Schools Equitably” and “Power to the Students.” School officials also attended.

Westbury Superintendent Eudes S. Budhai said the district could be looking at cuts to athletics, electives and other student programs should there be a state shortfall.

Junior Alahna Perez, 16, noted the district’s overcrowding issues. The district has struggled for years with surging demand, much of it from a growing immigrant population, officials have said. Enrollment

districtwide rose nearly 30 percent from 2006 to 2016 — from 3,830 to 4,934 students, according to state figures.

Conditions are so crowded at the high school that Westbury ninth-graders attend classes in leased space at Nassau Community College. “We feel it’s time for us to take a stand and ask for what we deserve,” Perez said.

Jahshua Taylor, 16, a junior, called on the state to increase the district’s percentage of Foundation Aid.

“We can no longer survive on the bare minimum that the state is aiding us with,” he said.

Westbury’s call for action Tuesday follows a recent resolution by the Brentwood school district’s Board of Education authorizing its attorneys to file a com-

plaint asking the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights to investigate its claims, naming the state, the legislature, the governor and the state education department.

Brentwood has directed its attorneys to examine how the state’s failure to fully fund its school-aid formula has resulted in “gross inequity” for students in the mostly minority district, violating the Civil Rights Act, according to the board resolution.

The Foundation Aid formula was put in place after the state’s highest court in 2006 ruled that New York was underfunding schools and not meeting its constitutional burden to provide all children with a “sound basic education.”

## NASSAU POLLING-PLACE INSPECTOR CHARGED

BY CELESTE HADRICK

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A Nassau County clerk’s employee who worked on Legis. John Ferretti Jr.’s election campaign was arrested Tuesday for allegedly altering sample ballots to favor Ferretti during last September’s Republican primary.

Jonathan Maldonado, 36, of Garden City, pleaded not guilty in First District Court in Hempstead to a misdemeanor charge of official misconduct and two unclassified misde-

meanor counts in connection with a primary election, according to a news release from District Attorney Madeline Singas. Unclassified charges are outside the penal law, but still have criminal consequences.

Singas said Maldonado, who earned \$46,600 last year as Republican County Clerk Maureen O’Connell’s driver, was the chairman of the board of inspectors at a Seaford polling place when he allegedly placed 511 sample ballots on the sign-in tables, directing voters to cast

their ballots for Ferretti, who was O’Connell’s chief deputy. Ferretti also is Nassau Republican chairman Joseph Mondello’s great-nephew.

The altered ballots had an arrow pointing to Ferretti’s name with written instructions to “Fill in the Oval Here.” Singas said an identically altered ballot was distributed with Ferretti campaign literature.

NYPD Det. Jim Coll, a Seaford Republican, had won an eleventh-hour court appeal to challenge Ferretti in the pri-

mary. Coll called the district attorney when he saw the altered sample ballots.

“I had said all along that the [Republican] machine wasn’t waging a fair fight,” Coll said Tuesday. “The sense of entitlement overshadowed how elections should be conducted.”

Ferretti (R-Levittown), who won the primary and general election, did not return a call for comment Tuesday. He said in September that he had nothing to do with the doctored ballots.

Maldonado could not be

reached for comment. His attorney Barry Bassik did not return a call for comment. O’Connell also did not return a call.

Singas, a Democrat, said Maldonado allegedly abused his access “to help his boss’ campaign . . . we have no tolerance for any effort to deprive the people of Nassau County of their right to free and fair elections.”

Maldonado was released on his own recognizance. He faces up to a year in jail on the top count.